

## **Our Families Can Talk About Anything: Specialized Educational Workshops, Information and Referrals addressing Culture, Adaptation, Intergenerational Communication, and Healthy Relationships for Newcomers**

Our Families Can Talk about Anything! (OFTA) Program engages and educates recent newcomer adults and youth in healthy conversations and learning about relationships, parenting, and sexual health, within a settlement context. The goal of the program is to support successful integration of newcomer families through cultural education, adaptation and intergenerational communication on sensitive, but critical topics like sexual health. Group sessions include a youth group, multicultural parent groups, couples' groups and gender-based sexual and reproductive health groups. We also provide customized individual consultations & referrals.

Since its inception in 2001, this ongoing project has been a core piece of SERC's work with newcomer parents, couples, adults and youth. Main activities include in-depth educational workshop series with newcomers about adaptation, acculturation, intergenerational communication and sexuality. In most years, we offer service provider training.

Beginning in 2014 Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), now Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), has supported a major portion of the OFTA work.

### **GOAL, OBJECTIVES & EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

#### **GOAL**

To support the successful integration of newcomer families in Manitoba by

- a) Engaging them in a process of dialogue & education on culture, adaptation, intergenerational communication & sexuality, and
- b) Building the capacity of service providers

In relation to national settlement standards, this project supports the following two main outcomes:

- Newcomers understand life in Manitoba, including laws, rights, responsibilities, and how to access community resources and social networks
- Newcomers have access to specialized services to aid settlement and integration

#### **OBJECTIVES**

##### **IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE PARENTS, YOUTH AND COUPLES GROUPS OBJECTIVES:**

- To create a safe, non-threatening, dynamic environment, where participants can engage in open discussion and debate, clarify deeply held values and beliefs as well as explore new ideas, without feeling judged or labeled
- To support processes that are participant-driven and culturally responsive, so that participants feel the service provided is accessible and that their community, culture, gender and values are respected
- To provide participants with new knowledge, skills and strategies to identify and address challenges in parent-child and couples relationships
- To help participants build a greater understanding and analysis of the influences, stressors, underlying beliefs and values that contribute to challenges in relationships

O E.g. couples: changing gender roles and power dynamics, greater social freedoms, differential rates of adaptation, etc.

O E.g. parent-youth: tensions between preserving culture and adapting to a new culture; social and cultural codes related to sexuality and gender expectations, influences of peers, media, school, etc.

- To support greater empathy and understanding among participants for their parent, child or partner
- To provide supports to parent-child and couples' relationships, to effectively communicate with each other about sexuality and other core relationship issues (e.g. physical and emotional changes during puberty, dating, STBIs, cultural and gender role expectations, intimacy, sexual consent)
- To explore the context of "youth culture," and provide newcomer youth with knowledge and skills to adapt and integrate successfully (e.g. addressing conflict, mediation, media literacy, mental health, violence prevention, self-esteem, identity)
- To identify and address participants' key questions related to sexuality/sexual and reproductive health
- To increase participants' knowledge of sexual and reproductive health rights and responsibilities
- To support the acculturation process by serving as 'cultural brokers' to explain Canadian norms and values, laws and society, and to explore how they may compare or contrast with participants' countries of origin
- To increase participants' awareness of community resources
- To enable participants to serve as (informal) resources within their families or communities

#### **SERVICE PROVIDER OBJECTIVES**

- To increase service providers with greater analysis and knowledge of culture, adaptation, intergenerational communication and sexuality so that they can provide more culturally competent, effective services

#### **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

Participants will:

- Have access to appropriate information and services to address settlement needs
- Have an increased knowledge and understanding of the interplay of culture, adaptation and sexuality, in the context of their lives and relationships
- Learn new or enhance existing strategies to address intergenerational or couples conflict
- Have an increased knowledge of life in Canada, including laws, rights, and responsibilities
- Have an increased awareness of community and other resources to deal with settlement issues
- Make informed decisions about life in Canada, enjoy rights and act on their responsibilities in Canadian society
- Feel their values, culture and experiences were validated in both the content and process of the sessions (i.e. cultural responsiveness)
- Feel safe to participate and share their feelings and ideas
- Report using their new skills and/or communicating new knowledge within their families and their communities
- Be given a set of resources on the issues of sexuality, intergenerational communication and couples communication/relationships



### **SERVICE PROVIDERS & COMMUNITY LEADERS WILL:**

- Become familiar with the main issues of culture, adaptation and sexuality addressed in the “Our Families” project, and acquire new knowledge and skills that build cultural competence and ability to address sexuality issues in their work & relations with immigrant and refugee clients

### **SERC WILL:**

- Continue to build internal capacity to work effectively in Immigrant & Refugee communities
- Strengthen relationships across settlement and community sectors to better serve Immigrant & Refugee communities
- Be responsive to participant input in order to continuously improve programs

### **COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS TOPICS**

In this project, each series has a set of topics tailored to the participant groups – parents, youth and couples. The following describe the core topics discussed in the sessions. In implementation, there is a great deal of flexibility to address arising questions of participants. Topics are presented in such a manner that is accessible to participants and tailored to their language level, their length of stay in Canada, their gender, and so on. Topics are also embedded in a process of dialogue and discussion so that a two-way flow of (cultural) information and knowledge is encouraged in sessions.

#### **YOUTH GROUP**

The youth-focused sessions are developed in such a way as to support youth to make positive and informed decisions about their bodies and about their own sexual health through learning activities, discussion, and games. Participants are provided resources and tools to assist in developing their own identities and in making good choices about their bodies and relationships.

Topics addressed with youth include adaptation and acculturation (e.g. change processes, culture shock, isolation, racism, role reversal, stressed parents, poverty); self-esteem, body image (impacts of culture, media, technology); healthy relationships (e.g. recognizing positive and negative issues); consent; sexuality (youth sexuality and meanings, beliefs and values associated with sexuality across cultures, dating and communication with partners; myths and facts related to sexuality and Canadian context, sexual development including anatomy, physiology, birth control, STI/HIV prevention); decision making; communication and listening skills (with parents, peers, in a new culture) understanding/empathizing with parents; conflict resolution skills and managing stress; and future plans and goals.

#### **PARENT/CAREGIVER GROUPS**

The parent-focused sessions are intended to support parents and caregivers in understanding Canadian parenting culture and government systems/laws (e.g., school, Child and Family Services, etc.) related to parenting. Addressing the challenges and opportunities of parenting, participants learn about sexuality and sexual health, communicating with children, and finding appropriate resources for themselves and their families to support cultural integration.

Topics addressed with participants cover a range of parenting and youth issues, including adaptation and (models of) change; cultural values and context (including how parents/adults learn values and learn about sexuality); challenges of raising children in a new culture; parenting styles; culture clash; concept of finding the balance between the two cultures/finding the positive in both cultures; Canadian laws (including parental rights and responsibilities); “cultural brokering” to explain Canadian social norms and values; communication and listening skills; children and media (Internet, TV); sexuality education in school (what children are learning); children’s sexual



development, puberty, emotional/social changes of adolescence; helping children become critical thinkers, addressing children's online universe, porn and cyberbullying, and associated legal issues.

### **SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH GROUPS**

The sexual and reproductive health groups are oriented to adult men and women from the parent cohort, and are usually delivered in gender-based groups covering topics of basic anatomy; reproduction/how sexual and reproductive organs work; preventive health tests (Pap test, HPV); STIs and prevention; vaginal and breast health; menopause, birth control methods, reproductive rights in Canada, sexual desire and pleasure; and healthy relationships, etc.

### **RELATIONSHIP SESSIONS**

We offer additional sessions to adults in relationships. Sexuality and reproductive health issues figure prominently in the discussions.

Topics addressed with participants include issues that couples face when they come to a new country; adaptation process and its effect on the relationship; gender roles and sexuality; changes of gender roles coming to a new country; marriage expectations (home country and Canada); ways to build strong relationships; model of change; effective communication/gender, culture and communication; areas of conflict for couples; expressing anger and how to resolve conflict; creating win-win situations; problem-solving skills; forgiveness; respect and power balance in relationships; characteristics of "healthy" relationships; STIs/HIV; how couples can support one another.

### **INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATIONS**

Adults are also served in small consultation sessions on specific sexuality and family-related issues where SERC tailors the information and resources to their needs.